

DCFS Foster Parent Advisory committee
Meeting
January 5, 2007 10:00 AM
Justice Building, Little Rock

Attendees: Pat Page, Interim Director; Sandi Doherty, Special Assistant to the Director; Miranda Raines, Foster Parent Ombudsman; Sheryl Alexander, DCFS Policy Manager; Mona Davis, Planning Unit Manager; Diane Robinson and Terri Loony, Admin. Office of the Courts; Consevella James, Exec. Director for Treatment Home, Inc.; Leah Keys, Program Dir. For Centers for Youth and Families

Foster Parent Representatives: Fred & Diane Huffmaster, Juanita Williams, Sherri McCourtney, Michael FitzPatrick, June Simpson, Angie Harris, Marie Brown, Dorothy Younger, Suzan Reinhardt, George DeRoeck, Trina Hoofman, Ira Smith, Kim Pendergraft, Arthur & Brenda Reed

Support groups

Several local representatives talked about the support groups that they have in their areas. These range from very new groups that have yet to become productive to groups that have been meeting for several years. Some of the groups charge monthly dues to be part of the group. This money is used in some areas to help foster parents with needs that are deemed emergency situations, such as a foster parent becomes ill and cannot cover a specific expense. Other groups use the fee to stock a supply closet with things head lice treatment. One group uses the money to buy flowers or other special occasion gifts for foster parents involved in their association.

Inclusion of Therapeutic Foster Care (TFC) parents

The DCFS foster parent representatives unanimously voted that TFC foster parents should not be part of the core group. Several reasons were cited.

- DCFS foster parents often have children for a weekend or a night sometime. TFC usually only have long term placements.
- DCFS foster parents feel that they are looked down upon by the TFC foster parents.
- Large difference in board payment. TFC get a stipend and DCFS gets more or less a reimbursement.
- TFC children seem to be more medicated than DCFS placed kids.
- TFC seems to isolate themselves from DCFS.
- TFC kids seem to stay in care longer than DCFS placed kids.

The group felt that the differences were too numerous to make the Advisory Committee useful for both groups.

Faith Based Foster Care

June Simpson told the group about a project that the central AR faith based groups are trying to implement. The idea is that a church group would take responsibility for recruiting, training, certifying, and monitoring foster homes in which DCFS children could be placed.

Other discussion

- UAMS Evaluations aren't always useful.
- No child that has a UAMS eval is diagnosed "normal".
- They are testing infants for things that are developmentally appropriate.
- Some of the services aren't available in the area that the foster parent lives.
- The wait is often so long for the eval that the foster parent will often already have some of the testing done elsewhere.
- Medical Passports are incomplete, not doctor friendly, 352's are not helpful.
- The initial health screening is incomplete (a joke), they don't check for sexual abuse.

The foster parents would like to have a resource check list for the areas that they live in.

Training for Family Service Workers (FSW) and foster parents:

- FSW's and foster parents need more detailed training about the developmental stages of children.
- Both need more training on the types of medications that foster children are prescribed.
- Foster parents should be included in training both new foster parents and FSW's.
- Foster parents should be more sensitive to workers and workers to foster parents. There should be some training around this issue
- There should be some training options for foster parents. They should be able to choose what kind of training they need based on what is going on in their home at any particular time.
- A good way for foster parents to learn is through networking with other foster parents. They would like to have more opportunity to do this.
- Foster parents would like to have more notice of training that is available in their areas.
- Would like to have more on-line training hours, videos and books counted toward their annual requirement.

- A resource library would be helpful.
- Don't want to be required to go to a training that is not beneficial to them. They don't want to be "benchwarmers" in order to get training hours.

Issues regarding FSW's

- Need to let foster parents be involved in the assessment of FSW.
- Need to allow foster parents a time to report on the FSW without the FSW being in the room (admin reviews gave foster parent that opportunity).
- FSW's don't always have needed info about the child. Need some type of "report card" to follow the child from home to home.
- Foster parents are always given a copy of the case plan or court orders.
- Often not notified of staffings and/or court.
- Aren't made aware of resources available to provide better care of the children in their homes.
- FSW's don't always know their own policies and procedures well enough when a case load is given to them.
 - FSW's need to be trained on the importance of maintaining a good relationship with the foster parents.
- FSW's and others who transport or supervise visits need CPR training

Foster parent drug testing - Sheryl Alexander

The foster parents in this group were in favor of the drug testing policy and some even felt that it should be stricter. Ms. Alexander cited that the policy is based on the current DCFS policy for employees. She provided a handout with the screening criteria and consequences for a positive drug screen.

Suggestion for Foster Parent smoking ban – Pat Page

The foster parents varied in their opinions about the smoking ban. While some thought it was a good idea to have a complete ban of smoking other thought it would be a better idea to consider what children could be placed in the homes of foster parents who smoke. Others thought it would be sufficient to make a policy that allowed foster parents to only smoke outside.

Foster Care Board Rate – Mona Davis

Mona handed out a packet of information to the group regarding board rates locally and in other states. There was also analysis of the current cost of in-home care for children of varying ages. It appears that present board rates match actual costs and are in line with other nearby states. A committee of foster parents and DCFS staff are still meeting in

order to determine if an adjustment needs to be (or can be) made to the current board rate. Travel will also be discussed with this committee.

Foster parents reported that there are wide differences in the interpretation of Special Board Rates within each area. Nearly identical cases are judged differently by different individuals. Examples were given of foster homes that had discovered how to “work the system” so as to receive Special Board Rates for children.

Update on ID Cards – Miranda Raines

Once Ms. Page gives her approval, the Resource Worker’s will be responsible for taking the foster parents picture for the ID card. There will paperwork to sign saying you will not misuse or misrepresent yourself while using the ID card. Once the photo and paperwork are taken, the Resource Worker will be responsible for sending the information into the Personal Office where the ID’s will be made. Foster parents can utilize the ID’s while at doctor’s appointments, picking up kids at school, at different DCFS office’s, etc.... The ID’s are only intended to be helpful, they will not be required. [Update—Bob Sebourn, DCFS Training Manager, sent a written request to Ms. Page for her approval.](#)

Training issues about court for foster parents – Diane and Terri (Administrative Office of the Courts – Court Improvement Project)

Foster parents indicated that there might be a need for training around court and testimony and foster parent’s rights in court. Some foster parents say that they are not notified of court and are often discouraged from attending. Foster parents would like to have a way of giving the court a report about the progress of the case from their view point. A committee was formed to work together to develop a check of some type that could be added to either the CASA or DCFS court reports. This check sheet will be a relatively simple form that will ask for only facts about the case. That committee is comprised of;

Juanita Williams
Trina Huffman
Angie Harris
Dorothy Younger

A conference call will be scheduled so that these ladies can get together to discuss what they would like this check sheet to contain. They will have a draft ready for the next meeting.

Best practice cards – Diane/Terri

Overall the group thought the cards would be useful. They had some ideas about making them more useful for new foster parents;

- Should use these for training new foster parents.
- Need a listing of acronyms and terms such as; TPR, ICPC, staffing

- Should include some tips about how to be prepared for court, how to dress, how to present information.
- Make a note that the judge wants to hear what the foster parent has to say and that they don't expect you speak like an attorney.

Comments about best practice cards can be sent to Diane/Terri at cip@arkansas.gov.

Foster parents Bill of Rights – Consevella

Consevella presented a “Foster Parents Bill of Rights” to the group for their review. She would like to get a group together to develop something similar for Arkansas foster parents and possibly present it to the legislature during this session.

The date of the next meeting was suggested as April 13, 2007 in Little Rock.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:30 PM